

New Guinea

US Army soldiers fought the Japanese on New Guinea from August 1942 until Japan's surrender three years later. James Wesley Parrish, Clemson College Class of 1940, was an officer with the 158th Regimental Combat Team, the Bushmasters, which helped turn back and eventually defeat the Japanese on New Guinea.

Jimmie Parrish was a textile engineering major from Clover. He was a member of the York County Club and in 1939 attended ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. As a senior, Parrish was appointed a cadet first lieutenant in Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment.

As the United States expanded its military in response to the growing crisis overseas, Parrish reported for duty at Fort Jackson in January 1941. He was sent to Camp Wheeler outside Macon, Georgia and then to Fort Benning, at Columbus. After completing training, Parrish was assigned to the 158th Regimental Combat Team, a separate infantry regiment not assigned to a division.

Within a month of the Pearl Harbor attack, the 158th was sent to protect the Panama Canal Zone. Duty in the zone also afforded the opportunity for training in jungle conditions. With an eye toward operations on Pacific islands, each soldier in the 158th received extensive training in jungle warfare, knife fighting, and hand-to-hand combat.

In January 1943, the 158th shipped to Australia to join the newly activated 6th Army under the command of General Walter Krueger. It soon moved on to New Guinea, where the US Army had experienced some of its earliest actions against the Japanese. In December 1943, the 158th participated in landings at Arawe in an operation intended to isolate the major Japanese naval and air base at Rabaul on the eastern tip of nearby New Britain. By this time, the Bushmasters were at Finschhafen, on the northeastern peninsula of New Guinea. The main Japanese ground forces on New Guinea were to the west, on the north side of the formidable Owen Stanley Mountains.

In May 1944, the 158th was ordered west to Toem to begin an assault on the Japanese airfield near Sarmi on New Guinea's northern coast. Unfortunately, the Japanese were ready. General Hachiro Tagami, the enemy commander, had assembled 11,000 troops including first-rate soldiers and attempted to envelop the American forces with a double pincer movement.

On May 23, the 158th advanced on the Japanese airstrip but was halted by fierce Japanese resistance. The 158th resumed its attack two days later and encountered a coral ridgeline dominated by a single towering tree. The battle for Lone Tree Hill raged over the next several



days as the 158th made agonizingly slow progress. On May 27, First Lieutenant Parrish was severely wounded. Parrish lingered for two weeks before succumbing to his wounds on June 10.

Parrish was awarded the Bronze Star medal and the Purple Heart, along with a Presidential Unit Citation, Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and World War II Victory Medal. His remains were returned to Clover where he was reinterred in the Woodside Cemetery. He was survived by his parents and brother.

